



FAST Friends

Text by Jon DeVecchio
(Pictured here on the
"Circus Bear")



Photos courtesy of theSBImage.com

After years of excuses, I finally got around to "doing a track day". About a year ago, a friend told me about a race track opening up a

few hours away. I "liked" their Facebook page and several weeks later there was a neglected Ninja 250 in my garage.

The winter was spent addressing some of the Ninja's shortcomings. It was christened the "Circus Bear", as this tiny motorcycle was expected to hurl my 200 pounds around a 2.1 mile road course. The goal was to do my first track day in 2013. A road trip to inspect the track firsthand sealed the deal. The next day I was a member of the New York Safety Track (NYST) in scenic Harpersfield, NY and was registered for September.

Why should you consider doing a track day? Three reasons come to mind: fun, skills, and friendship.

Fun

When you cross through the NYST gates, you instantly feel part of something special. The sights and sounds convince you that this is no ordinary place to ride your motorcycle. Although there are basic rules,



you have many fewer distractions than on the street. As a result, you're submersed more deeply into the riding experience.

It's very exciting! If you have a good first track day, you will consider rearranging your life to return as soon as possible. It was so much fun that I sold my trusty dual sport immediately to fund gear and additional track days. Three weeks later the Circus Bear was back doing laps.

Like any other fun activity, money comes into play. I suggest having reasonable goals initially. While you can use your current motorcycle, sport bikes seem to be the ideal mount for this. Thankfully, inexpensive sport bikes are abundant in the marketplace. Travel expenses, parts, maintenance, and food also drive up the cost of a track day. Last, of course, is the cost of the track fee per visit.

However, you don't have to be rich to enjoy this pastime. Towing your motorcycle trailer with a small car, camping at the track, and modest equipment make it affordable. I'm proof you can do this on a shoestring.

Skills

Several times I was told that the street would become "boring" after the experience. While there are some techniques not suitable for the highway, track riding can definitely improve your street riding. You might even find the street more enjoyable after track time.

The NYST offers a riding school and on-track coaches to guide you. This aspect is literally priceless. You don't pay extra for the instruction. But do not assume that the training is second-rate. The curriculum was designed for NYST, providing students with advanced techniques and immediate feedback to develop skills quickly. Regardless of skill level going in, they can have you improving with each lap.

Will going to the track make you a better street rider? Probably. But please consider your riding environment before putting your helmet on. The track is an appropriate place to grandstand your skills. Public roads are not.

Track time can accelerate skill development because proper cornering is directly related to confidence and control. On the track one can sharpen these tools due to the routine and predictable nature of the road course. A rider may then be better prepared for twisty back road challenges. That being said, track behaviors like extreme body positioning, radical cornering lines and maintaining a close proximity to other riders aren't advisable on the street.

Another track skill that might transfer well to the street is reaction to panic situations. At the track you may experience "pucker moments", such as temporary loss of traction or entering a corner too fast. Because of your focus it's easier to work through these events without a problem. Managing these mishaps inspires confidence and is great practice for handling street riding surprises.

Friendship

The best reason for going to the track, what ties everything together, is the people. They are serious bike nuts! In my experience, fellow riders and track staff are a welcoming bunch.

I convinced several riding acquaintances to join me at the track. When we get together now, we just smile and reminisce. We've been to the other side and don't want to go back to only street riding. It has strengthened our friendship and we all plan on returning next season.

In the short time we have been associated with the NYST, new friendships have been made. And the bonds have been strong right from the start. We share video footage and photos for laughs and improvement. Track people are exceptional. Like the old saying goes, "If you have to ask why it's fun to ride the track, you probably wouldn't understand." It's a good place to find fast friends.

The New York Safety Track celebrated the end of its first season with a pig roast party. They wanted to thank their members, coaches, and staff for all their support. What they got in return were cheers and applause for creating such a cool place to ride.

The track is not for everyone, but might be for you. Novice requirements for bike prep and gear are simple to encourage first timers. Don't have a sport bike? No big deal. We saw a variety of dual sports and supermotos. Take whatever motorcycle you have in the garage.

I might have done a track day sooner had



someone pushed me a bit more. The timing was never right, so I have no regrets. Don't expect me to become a track junkie anytime soon. There is serious commitment involved to do this frequently. But a few days per year are definitely in the plans.

Visit a track near you. You will be rewarded with a good time, some new skills to work on, and friends that will strengthen your passion for riding.